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March 30, 2005

MINNESOTA BULLETIN NO. 300-5-33

SUBJECT: LTP – CSP – BLUE EARTH WATERSHED – ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR
VERIFICATION OF 2004 CSP CONTRACTS PRIOR TO ISSUING 2005
PAYMENTS

Purpose. To inform NRCS employees in the Blue Earth Watershed of the CSP contract and conservation plan requirements and expectations of CSP participants.

Expiration Date. September 30, 2005

Action Due Dates for 2004 CSP contracts are as follows:

April 8 – complete all modifications

April 13 – approve all modifications

The national office is holding net-conferences to train all effected field staff on the process to make 2005 Conservation Service Programs (CSP) payments. Field staff dealing with 2004 CSP contract updates need to participate in these net-conferences. The conference coordinates will be sent out via e-mail. The first net-conference was held last Tuesday and can be seen on the following link <https://www.mymeetings.com/nc/join.php?i=RG5255647&p=3034259&t=r>.

The information listed below was previously distributed to all District Conservationists in the Blue Earth CSP watershed last November as a draft bulletin.

Hopefully this clean-up process will lead to creating high quality CSP contracts and conservation plans that will help approved participants understand the program's requirements, meet their contract obligations and verify that there are no discrepancies.

There are several items that need to be addressed in the Blue Earth River Watershed BEFORE the payment of 2005 contracts:

- 2004 CSP contracts with only one year scheduled
 - Any contract that did not fully scheduled all years will need to be modified to add planned practices and enhancements and scheduled ALL years of the contract. This has already been done through a nationally run script.

- Field verification of the conservation plan and contract
 - A field (visual) verification of all CSP conservation plans will be made as soon as possible, this could have been done last fall. This is a conservation planning activity, meant to assure that the CSP program is successful and that there are no embarrassments to the program in any of the contracts
 - If you have been on the farm recently or did field verifications during sign up, and know the status of the farm or portion of the farm that is in the contract, another field visit is not necessary. If you have not seen the farm, then a field visit is needed. The in-field verification will be confirming that those obvious minimum eligibility requirements have been met such as crop rotation, residue management, and ephemeral and classic gully control.
 - Producers were required to identify the practices/activities that they had installed or were doing on their operation in order to determine their eligibility and category status. As stated in the appendix of the CCC-1200, the participant must maintain at least the level of stewardship identified in the benchmark for the entire contract period. If you have not already done so, verify with the producer on the enrollment category sheet which practices and activities that the producer currently has on his/her operation. The producer must provide documentation that they are completing the given activity(s) and/or maintaining the given practice(s). Where appropriate all category practices and activities will also be field verified.
 - By signing the CCC-1200, the participant also agreed “to modify or update an existing practice, if necessary, to meet minimum Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) practice standards within 12 months after the date of determination that the practice does not meet the standard.” Therefore, if the field verification determines that a practice does not meet NRCS standards, the producer has 1 year to modify or update that practice.
 - The verification is to be documented in the conservation assistance notes. If you find that something was overlooked and needs correction (such as a gulley that needs treatment and was not identified in the contract), schedule the needed practice to correct the problem.
- Corrections to the scheduling of Enhancements
 - There are several contracts that include the Nutrient Management Enhancement - “Side dress or split commercial N fertilizer applications (spring pre-plant and side dress) are used on coarse textured soils.” When split application of fertilizer is done, it is almost always only for the production of the corn crop in a corn-soybean rotation. Some contracts have incorrectly scheduled the split application enhancement for all crops for all years of the contract. District Conservationists need to check their CSP contracts and correctly determine the amount of acres that participants are eligible to receive payment of this enhancement.

- General Nutrient Management Concerns
 - There have been several concerns voiced regarding the CSP nutrient management requirements and several of you have had participants request additional instructions and details to explain what they are required (or allowed) to apply for fertilizer this fall. This is probably happening because participants have not developed a nutrient management plan. Most participants were told how their eligible fields met the water quality criteria but they do not fully understand the criteria or how to determine the amount of fertilizer they can apply and still remain in compliance with the program's guidelines.
 - It's a good idea for all participants to develop detailed nutrient management plans but we will not require this as a condition of program eligibility. However, CSP participants must follow the 2004 CSP Nutrient Management guidance attached to this bulletin and this check sheet for Nutrient Management or its equivalent must be provided to each participant. These items should be discussed during the verification field visit.
 - All Blue Earth approved 2004 participants wanting to transition to Tier III must be in full compliance with the Minnesota 590 practice standard.
 - We hope to have 2004 Enhancement Job Sheets completed shortly. Each approved participant will be signing these Job sheets and proving the required documentation as part of the payment process.
 - To earn a new enhancement payment the applicant must have successfully implemented the required activity. In most cases applicants haven't had sufficient time (since last September) to fully implement a new enhancements. Contact Leah Duzy prior to scheduling a new enhancement for payment in 2005.
 - All reoccurring enhancements, those that were originally paid in 2004 and are scheduled to be paid in 2005, will have the payment completed regardless of the timing of their implementation in 2005. Producers will be asked to certify that they intent to carry these enhancements forward this year.

The process for 2004 applicants to transition land into a different Tier or to add new land will be handled later this year, after the current 2005 sign-up is completed.

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

DIST: Blue Earth Watershed DCs
Blue Earth Watershed ASTC (FO)